

Written Testimony of Scott W. Swartz, Associate Program Manager
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Prepared for the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing – February 22, 2013
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget

My testimony is in opposition to the proposal to eliminate funding for the John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative Programs, funded by the Department of Social Services since 1999. My title is Associate Program Manager of the Fatherhood Initiative at Madonna Place, Inc. a family support agency in Norwich. I represent Madonna Place and the families we serve which include New London & Windham counties. The desired result of our services is that children in New London County will develop in safe and nurturing families.

That's the point - ultimately it's about the kids. We work with dads and male figures to help them meet their children's needs and become a positive, responsible role model. From our data, we know that a typical dad that comes to us is a divorced, 35 year old individual trying to make ends meet on less than \$20,000 annually. That may be a typical dad but we meet with men from all walks of life; the business man who makes over \$75,000 annually to the dad collecting Social Security Disability or collecting unemployment and unable to find a job. Their challenges can cover the gamut from mental illness or a history of substance abuse to just needing some guidance with child development and appropriate discipline. They could be struggling with unemployment; meeting basic needs, or have relationship difficulties with the mother of their children and many have lost hope. Despite the barriers to being the father they want to be, these men want to tackle these struggles and challenges for the sake of their children.

The common denominator is that each of these men and there have been nearly 700 in the past 4 years; are struggling with something in their life and lack the tools to get back on track. The John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative Programs give them that hope and help them address whatever challenges are in the way of them being positively engaged with their kids.

The men that succeed within the Fatherhood Programs understand that by them being successful, the odds of their children succeeding increase. Here are a few facts collected from recent studies that show the benefits from having a father who is involved with their children.

1. Children with involved and nurturing fathers compared to children who have uninvolved fathers are significantly more likely to:
 - **To do well in school**
 - **Have healthy self-esteem**
 - **Exhibit empathy and pro-social behavior**
 - **Avoid high-risk behaviors such as drug use, truancy and criminal activity**
2. Having a loving and nurturing father is as important for a child's **happiness, well being and social and academic success** as having a loving and nurturing mother.

3. In some studies, the presence of a father's love was actually a better predictor than the presence of a mother's love for certain outcomes, including delinquency and conduct problems, substance abuse and overall **mental health** and well-being.
4. A survey of over 20,000 parents found that when fathers are involved in their children's education including attending school meetings and volunteering at school, their children were more likely to **get A's, enjoy school and participate in extracurricular activities** and **less likely to have repeated a grade.**

Those nearly 700 dads that I mentioned earlier - they have over 1,300 children. That is 1,300 kids that our **one** Fatherhood Initiative Program has had a positive impact on. 1,300 future adults that are more likely to become productive members of Connecticut.

Even President Obama understands the importance of fathers on our society. To quote from his State of the Union Address - "And we'll work to strengthen families by removing the financial deterrents to marriage for low-income couples, and do more **to encourage fatherhood** – because what makes you a man isn't the ability to conceive a child; it's having the courage to raise one. And we want to encourage that." "Stronger families. Stronger communities. A stronger America."

Let's keep Connecticut strong. Let's keep Connecticut's families strong.

The John S. Martinez Fatherhood Initiative Programs give dads the courage to raise their children and build stronger families.

I'm asking you to have the courage to keep it going.